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ABSTRACT

Department chairmanship responsibilities are becoming heavier in the face of the demands associated with issues that challenge academic communities at the close of the 20th century. A director of forensics is occupied with decisions about the forensics program's philosophy, to provide understanding and impetus for team and individual goals, and its specific dimensions. A director must be, often simultaneously, coach, administrator, counselor, scholar, and teacher. With a review of roles and duties that accompany the positions of department chair and forensics director, an important question must focus on possible advantages and disadvantages of combining the responsibilities in the small college setting. Benefits of combining the two positions include the integration of speech activity within the department, recruiting potential, calendar coordination, educational scrutiny of forensics, and joint visibility through cooperative educational service. Some disadvantages are possible competition for attention, potential for inordinate emphasis of forensics, and a possible interpretation of chair favoritism for special interests. Survival with the dual directorship includes strategies such as colleague cooperation, delegation of responsibilities, organization, and guarding against isolation. (Contains 12 references.) (CR)

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Running Head: DEPARTMENT-FORENSICS DIRECTING

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Linking Department and Forensics Directing in the Small College

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Paper presented at the Eighty-second Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association

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Linking Department and Forensics Directing in the Small College

Stephen Ambrose (1996), reflecting upon the adventures surrounding his authorship of Undaunted Courage, recalls his preparation for writing by observing: "I had learned long ago, from my work on the Civil War and World War II, never to write about a battle until I had walked the ground on which it was fought" (p. A44). Similarly, I am learning that my experience as an educator includes an extended professional venture that provides educational perspective as I attempt to fill the roles of forensics director and department chair in a small liberal arts university. While the experience has provided stimulation for growth, it has also presented a combination of opportunities and limitations that are uniquely associated with a position consisting of dual functions.

Thus, the following discussion will seek to explore the position of department chair-director of forensics from the perspective of an educational adventurer-learner. Specifically, the focus will attempt to incorporate personal experience and observations with the insights of forensics and administrative research to provide a better understanding of how the roles of chairperson and forensics director can be viewed when they are linked together. To accomplish this goal, attention must first be directed toward the positions as individual entities before attempting to ascertain strengths and liabilities that should be observed when the roles are combined. Finally, possible strategies for handling the position composed of dual responsibilities will conclude the discussion.

Roles and Expectations for the Department Chair

Recent research and commentary have begun to emphasize the role of the department chair, and discussion of growing responsibilities for department leadership appears frequently in the literature of educational governance and administration. For example, Allen Tucker (1993) notes in his Chairing the Academic Department: Leadership among Peers that "increasing complexities of operating institutions of higher education, along with shrunken budgets, have led deans and other university administrators to delegate more and more tasks to department chairpersons" (p. 28). In agreement, Robert M. Diamond (1996), writing for The Chronicle of Higher Education, observes that "department heads are performing a wider range of crucial duties than ever before, which means that colleges must select the best possible people and give them new and different kinds of support" (p. B1).

Experienced educators and administrators can quickly attest to the diverse duties and roles assigned and assumed by department chairs. Diamond cites a calculation by a group of deans and department heads of the University of Nebraska that identifies 97 activities performed by department chairs (p. B2). Chairperson duties compiled by Kay Herr (1989) of Colorado State University delineate categories of responsibilities ranging from department governance and student-faculty affairs to office management, budget preparation-administration and professional development (pp. 10-12). John W. Creswell and Marijane England (1994), in their discussion of roles and functions of deans and chairpersons, observe that academic leaders must also respond to current pressures and trends that weigh heavily upon today's

institutions of higher learning. They explain:

> The climate for chairs and deans includes the increased demands for accountability and assessment, an emphasis on quality, the need to reallocate and reduce funding, changing demographics of the academic workforce, challenging student ethical and legal issues, and the need for a trained pool of academic leaders. (15)

In agreement, my experience indicates that department chair responsibilities are becoming heavier in the face of the demands associated with issues that challenge our academic communities at the close of the twentieth century.

Observation and calculation of the wide range of duties performed by chairpersons provide only a partial representation of how department heads must actually function on a routine basis. Allen Tucker stresses that "chairpersons are the only academic managers who must live with their decisions every day" (p. 33). In contrast to their chief administrative officers, department heads must work closely with colleagues. Significantly, the chair's association with fellow faculty members has to include a sensitive awareness of faculty-family relationships. The chairperson, Tucker notes, "must be acutely aware of the vital statistics of each family [faculty] member--births, deaths, marriages, divorces, illnesses, and even private financial woes" (p.33). Indeed, such relational expectations underscore how far-reaching and even personal the chair's roles and responsibilities have become.

The Director of Forensics

Through years of association with forensics education, I have become accustomed to the question: "But what does the forensics director do?" While a listing of items within a formal or informal job description is incomplete, my list of roles and tasks include the following:

Organize the forensics team.

Hear and evaluate events and debates.

Recruit beginners to try forensics.

Prepare and maintain a budget.

Cooperate with professional associations.

Schedule events and facilities.

Inform alumni and solicit their support.

Serve as forensics ambassador to university faculty and administration.

Host tournaments and special events.

Raise dollars for budget and special projects.

Provide programs for university and community functions.

Arrange and direct travel.

Listen to personal and interpersonal problems.

Negotiate relationships among team members and university staff.

Although this list does not include requirements such as van driving, sleep deprivation, and the completion of compulsory courses in "music appreciation," it does indicate the broad range of duties that comprise the position of forensics

director.

Reaching beyond my own job description, traditional explanations associated with the position of director of forensics often focus heavily upon the encompassing concept of responsibility. In their discussion of the important questions involving the composition of forensics teams, Allen, Willmington and Sprague (1991) note that directors are "responsible for providing the greatest possible educational good through their programs" (p. 390). The scope of responsibility of the director is described more concretely by Faules, Rieke and Rhodes at the outset of an enduring chapter exploring the role of the director; they emphasize that "the stability, nature, size, style, and success of the program rest with the director" (p. 69).

Certainly, the director is responsible for building and maintaining a solid foundation for the entire forensics program. In contrast to a coach's concern with a microstructure of forensics, "the director is occupied with decisions about the macrostructure" (Rhodes, 1990, p. 18). Such a broad responsibility entails designing and consistently examining the program's philosophy and its specific dimensions. To fulfill role demands, Hanson (1991) stresses that the educational preparation of the director has to extend beyond a background in speech competition. The forensics director, he insists, "has the task of helping to create and communicate the 'culture' of the program" (p. 11). In essence, the director's responsibility includes establishing a philosophy to provide understanding and impetus for team and individual goals. As noted previously by this educator (1991), such a philosophical force "influences the educational goals we set for individual students and how entire forensics teams are

organized; it affects how students and coaches visualize competition, and it determines the way programs see the communities in which they function" (p. 3).

Although the director's responsibility encompasses the totality of a forensics program, directing usually includes the dimension of coaching. While the director's coaching may take a variety of forms to comply with time limitations and overall program demands, it remains a foundational responsibility. Additionally, many of us who direct forensics repeatedly affirm that coaching dimensions, the actual assisting of students in speech development-performance, are among the most satisfying aspects of forensics direction. Still, the director's responsibility necessitates a focus that is more inclusive than coaching. As Rhodes, Faules and Rieke observed in 1978, "a director is more than a coach. A director must be, often simultaneously, coach, administrator, counselor, scholar, and teacher" (p.69).

Advantages

With a review of roles and duties that accompany the positions of department chair and forensics director, an important question must focus upon possible advantages and disadvantages of combining the responsibilities in the small college setting. Several benefits should be mentioned.

From my perspective, an immediate advantage of the arrangement is that it can encourage forensics to become and remain a vital part of a united communication program. Since the same desk must coordinate department and speech activities, forensics is viewed as one department activity that must fit with other goals, traditions and overall philosophy of the department. With the arrangement, my experience

demonstrates that there are fewer opportunities for forensics to exist as an activity unit within itself. If the chair has a commitment to maintain a healthy department and forensics program, he or she certainly holds the position that can balance and coordinate the two dimensions. An essential requirement, however, is that the chair must be committed to the philosophy that both dimensions are vital to the success of the unified communication department that includes forensics.

A clear benefit of this form of governance is that a unity of dimensions can have a positive impact upon recruiting for forensics and the department. While forensics students within our program are urged to select and complete the major of their choice, a number of them become better acquainted with the communication department through forensics and decide to complete additional work or concentrations within the department. Likewise, with the united department-activity direction, the chair can easily identify talented communication students who may be introduced to outlets for developing their communication skills in a variety of competitive and performance formats.

A simple and obvious asset of united directorship is that it encourages or even mandates a united calendar for the department and forensics program. Although the arrangement may force the chair to make some difficult choices, the result is that specific calendar objectives are identified. For example, department advisement days and state and national communication conventions must be coordinated with local, state and national speech tournaments. While the arrangement emphasizes the importance of coordination and planning of events, it also guarantees that the entire

department, despite its limited size, can be counted upon to support a speech tournament or help fulfill a department responsibility.

In a philosophical sense, my experience demonstrates that the arrangement can foster an educational scrutiny of forensics. Since the chair-director must support pedagogical principles and department goals along with a firm commitment to speech activity as a co-curricular activity, forensics should receive a broad-based review. It can be evaluated for its representation of sound educational principles and commitment to serving the needs of developing students. Additionally, the role of the chair can encourage a careful review of forensics options and trends in competition and performance.

Closely related to the above advantage is the possibility of increasing visibility for forensics and the department when the two dimensions are promoted by one faculty member. My experience indicates that by uniting a department with a strong co-curricular activity on a small campus, the visibility of the department and the forensics program can often be promoted together. The chair can use forensics activity to unite and publicize the department, and forensics can underscore and illustrate the department's educational and professional features by supporting departmental goals and objectives.

A distinct benefit of the dual position from my viewpoint is that it can encourage forensics to be involved in educational service. For example, as chairperson, I try to take advantage of the opportunities to encourage forensics students to volunteer in communication courses to present examples of speech

purposes, delivery modes and methods of speech development. In return, the speakers gain invaluable feedback as communicators through service in preparing for competition. Although this arrangement can certainly be utilized in a variety of settings, it is easily accomplished when the chair is also a strong supporter of forensics. In a sense, the department chairperson holds a platform for insisting that a forensics program include more than tournament competition and travel to other campus locations.

Disadvantages

As a review of related literature indicates, the positions of forensics director and department chair are demanding. When the responsibilities are combined, the joint task can at times become overwhelming. Thus, an immediate disadvantage must be linked to the necessity of focusing upon multiple roles and tasks.

The dual position often dictates that functions compete for attention and emphasis. My own experience reveals that it is easy to become so occupied with a specific responsibility that other obligations are slighted. For example, the hosting of a forensics tournament or traveling to a competition can occupy the director-chair's efforts for an extended period of time and require that department needs are neglected or at least postponed. Likewise, department obligations such as budget planning, class scheduling, and advisement activities can direct attention away from forensics students at important points in their preparation and performance. The result can also create a gap in the critical time table of a squad's development into a unified and productive team.

If competitive speech activity is highly visible, the director-chair faces an even greater danger of giving an inordinate emphasis to forensics. During the typical academic year on my university campus, forensics activity and achievement have a positive and lasting impact upon the department of communication. Team participants contribute significantly to department degree programs such as speech communication, public relations, and speech-theater education. Frequently, they serve in recruiting majors, tutoring students, and in promoting goodwill for forensics. Occasionally, however, speech activity can be seen as an entity within itself, and a highly visible forensics program may be perceived by the academic community as comprising the department of communication. Although positive public views of forensics are encouraging to coaches and speakers, such perceptions can limit attention to essential and marketable strengths of the department of communication. On occasion, forensics achievement can diminish the projection of the department's total contribution through service courses, degree opportunities and course offerings.

A third potential disadvantage recognizes possible hazards in the day to day attention that must be given to students. From my perspective, the chair-director must maintain a number of student relationships that are seen differently by various student groups. He or she must work closely with team members, students in the classroom, and the majors within the department. If the director is perceived as having one loyalty over others, the department fails to reach its potential. If students outside forensics or even speech competitors assign a "speech star with special status" label to some students, the result can be disadvantageous for the chair and

department. Thus, the "coaching" of squad members regarding expectations and role functions is constantly in order to insure that objectivity and fairness are serious goals. Clearly, the director-chair and team members play critical roles in establishing and maintaining a tone of equality and cohesiveness within the department.

Specifically, the chair-director faces a related disadvantage if some student members within the department detect what they perceive as "chair favoring" of forensics team members. However, if department leadership and speech team members can remain sensitive and aware of perception pitfalls, problems and misunderstandings can be avoided.

Strategies and Reminders

With increasing demands upon department leadership that are compounded by duties associated with directing forensics, the chair-director must continually search for insight and strategies to assist in meeting expectations. Although each educational-administrative situation is unique, my experience affirms some helpful reminders.

A strategic beginning is to establish the importance of faculty cooperation in blending a department philosophy with the sponsorship of forensics. If the faculty members of a small department share common purposes, openness and cohesiveness as educators and coaches, academic and forensics goals are more easily accomplished. Ideally, my objective is not only to emphasize joint faculty responsibilities in meeting departmental obligations within a growing academic unit, but each faculty member is also recruited as a supporter of educational forensics. A significant implication of this

orientation is the willingness of each instructor within our department to assist students with academic problems and to serve as a coach-critic for speakers as they prepare manuscripts and performances for tournament competition and public audiences.

My experience as a director-chair underscores the realization that one must recognize his or her own limitations as a single faculty member or administrator and seek to maximize accomplishments through cooperation. Speaking of the necessity of working with others to reach objectives, Diamond cites the advice of Ann Lucas, who urges chairpersons to change their orientations from emphasizing individual achievement as a teacher and focus upon accomplishing work through others (p. B2).

An extension of the strategy of cooperation calls for the chair-director to rethink traditional ways of viewing one's work and performance. As Robert Littlefield (1993) notes in discussing opportunities of "ex-directors," we often assume that forensics directors must perform a wide range of tasks and do them well to be successful or "'legitimate' Directors of Forensics" (p. 24). Just as Littlefield suggests diverse roles for former directors, active and discerning program administrators must recognize role diversity in delegating and assessing the strengths of others to perform specific responsibilities. Clearly, a director-chair cannot handle every aspect of department planning and every detail in forensics education. Hence, the advice of Kay Herr to department leadership is appropriate as she writes: "Remember . . . that you do not have to do all of these things by yourself because your faculty and staff are there to help you. Delegation of authority and tasks is an important duty in

itself" (p. 10).

An allocation strategy within our small department focuses upon the necessity of specific planning. For example, in most department meetings, a special time is allocated for department challenges and opportunities; another segment is devoted to forensics management and goal setting. A result is that numerous responsibilities and obligations are far less frightening and more easily accomplished when they are carefully analyzed and shared by all members of the department team.

The director-chair must take positive steps to guard against isolation. Despite the performance nature of forensics and traditional departmental functions open to public audiences, speech programs are often tempted to turn inward and neglect communication with the university community. Further, as Michael Bartanen observed in 1993, "forensics education may be hidden from view, taking place after 'business hours'" (p. 8). Thus, the department chair serving as forensics director should watch for opportunities to integrate the forensics program into the mainstream of the university. Usually, after a tournament experience, responsibilities including department paperwork demand attention, but messages from the department and the forensics program must be communicated. A priority practice within my routine is to follow each tournament experience with a memo to update all administrators of the university. Additionally and importantly, every request for public performance by the forensics team or other department groups should be carefully considered.

A final strategy must focus upon schedule management in meeting the demands of the dual position. Kay Herr's instruction to individuals assuming chair

responsibilities is even more applicable for the individual serving as director and chairperson. She writes: "Well organized people have to be even better organized, and persons not so well organized have to change their way of doing things or face chaos" (p. 44). She continues her personal and practical advice by insisting that "good organization can lessen the crisis mode for you and increase your satisfaction with your work" (p. 44).

From my perspective, effective organization of responsibilities remains a strategic goal that calls for openness to change in work and management habits. Through organization, the chair-director can bring order to challenges such as tournament hosting, squad entry preparations, and budget appeals while also remembering due dates for catalog copy and textbook selections. Even when one encounters barriers to goal accomplishment such as confusing schedules or conflicting agendas of administrators, colleagues and students, personal organizational choices can make one's responsibilities more accomplishable and rewarding.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper has been to understand the roles of the department chair and forensics director when they are linked together. Following an exploration of changing perceptions and functions of chairpersons and the responsibilities associated with forensics direction, special attention has been given to advantages and disadvantages of the dual leadership arrangement. While recognizing the uniqueness of each academic environment, identified advantages include integration of speech activity within the department, recruiting potential, calendar coordination, educational

scrutiny of forensics, and joint visibility through cooperative educational service. Noted disadvantages include possible competition for attention, potential for inordinate emphasis of forensics, and a possible interpretation of chair favoritism for special interests. The discussion of survival with the dual directorship includes strategies such as colleague cooperation, delegation of responsibilities, organization, and guarding against isolation.

Clearly, with the existence of small departments, the uniting of responsibilities for the department chair and forensics director continues as one option in meeting leadership and university needs. Hopefully, this discussion of benefits and limitations can stimulate ongoing study and further assessment.

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